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MY LITTLE BOOK OF PRAYER

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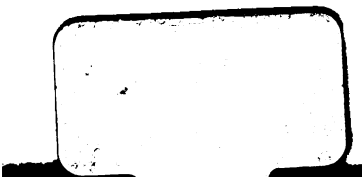

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Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson
with the
affectionate regards
of
Gen'l & Mrs. Rufus Saxton
Christmas
1906.

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MY LITTLE BOOK OF PRAYER

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MY LITTLE BOOK OF PRAYER

BY

MURIEL STRODE

THIRD EDITION

CHICAGO
THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING COMPANY
LONDON AGENTS
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & CO., LTD.
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My Creed.

Not one holy day, but seven.
Worshipping, not at the call of a bell,
but at the call of my soul.
Singing, not at the baton's sway, but
to the rhythm in my heart.
Loving because I must.
Giving because I cannot keep.
Doing for the joy of it.

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I WILL ask no other anointing save this—to draw very near to my own soul.

I MAY not overcome the inevitable, but O, it is mine to see that the inevitable does not overcome me.

I PRAYED for deliverance, and to prove the efficacy of prayer, I became my own deliverer.

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✠

O GOD, whate'er befall, spare me that supreme calamity — let no after-bitterness settle down with me. Misfortune is not mine until that hour.

✠

I WILL not ask that you nor you shall teach my soul the way, but I will trust my soul.

I will not ask that you nor you approve. The wild thyme is itself, nor asks consent of rose nor reed.

✠

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IF the populace marched in file, 'twere my signal to break from the ranks.

If a thousand generations did thus and so, 'twere my cue to do otherwise.

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I LONGED to build as you had builded, but I knew that your joy lay in the conception of your own design.

I longed to follow where your feet had trod, but I had watched your exhilaration as you felled a new way.

I longed to do that thing you did and be that thing you are, but I knew life's complement was yours because you were yourself.

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I WILL not follow where the path may lead, but I will go where there is no path, and I will leave a trail.

INFINITELY will I trust nature's instincts and promptings, but I will not call my own perversions nature.

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EACH receives but that which is his own returning.
Each hears but that which is the echo of his own call.
Each feels but that which has eaten into his own heart.

I DO not bemoan misfortune. To me there is no misfortune. I welcome whatever comes; I go out gladly to meet it.

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✠

IT is no stigma to wear rags; the disgrace is in continuing to wear them.

✠

O MY Cinderella, how gayly thou dost dance in thy crystal slippers. Can it be that thou, too, art dancing to a memory? Dost remember a night-long vigil when the salt must be culled from the ash?

✠

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✠

SAY not that this or that thing came to thwart you: it came only to test you.

✠

I NEVER doubt my strength to bear whatever Fate may bring, but Oh! that I may not go down before that which I bring myself.

✠

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THINK not because the chrysalis struggles that it is in need of you. Oh! I pray you, stay your eager hands, lest you despoil its silver wings.

THE earth shall yet surrender to him and the fates shall do his will, who marches on, though the promised land proved to be but a mirage, and the day of deliverance was cancelled. The gods shall yet anoint him and the morning stars shall sing.

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✠

AND when I pray my prayer of thankfulness, it shall be that I had only poverty to overcome. I have seen him who must overcome wealth.

✠

O GOD, let not that cumbrance be upon me of unmeaning lands and store, O let that weary weight rest not upon my soul. But give me, Lord, O give for my enchantment, that little wilding place of mine which I have worn with by-paths as I wandered there in dream.

✠

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I WILL not pray that each day be a perfect day, but I will pray to lapse not into indifference.

I will not pray that each time I shall build both strong and true, but, imperfect, I will pray for impulse that I may build anew.

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✠

GIVE me not, O God, that blind, fool faith in my friend, that sees no evil where evil is, but give me, O God, that sublime belief, that seeing evil I yet have faith.

✠

I PRAY not for the laggard's rest, nor surcease nor respite do I crave, but Lord, Lord, discipline my soul to tranquil ways, teach me the endless calm.

✠

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O GOD, I pray that not too much of calm be mine, but one day let the maddened rush of waters break against my soul.

O God, I pray for not too much of joy, but let me also weep alone in life's great night of woe.

O God, I pray for not too much of loving, but let my breast know bitterness, and let my heart know an unanswered cry.

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✠

NOT mine to declare when wounded that there is no pain, but Oh! to be able to say "I can endure pain."

Not mine to say when defeated that I do not care, but caring, to be able to say, "It shall not matter ultimately."

✠

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✠

OH! to be that strong in myself, that I ask not the morrow to be revealed.

✠

THE incoming may still thy heart's weeping, but only that which thou sendest forth will still the deeper cry of thy soul.

✠

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✠

AND when I pray my prayer for a contented mind, perhaps I will bethink me and pray for discontent, lest life's awful apathy set in.

✠

A FEEBLE conception means a child still-born, or a weakling. Oh! I tell you, it is desire! desire! desire! that brings forth a vital offspring.

✠

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✠

WISHING will bring things in the degree that it incites you to go after them.

✠

I WOULD travel in all climes that I might return and tell you of the beauty of my own little garden plot.

I would explore heaven and hell that I might come back and tell you what a charming place is the earth.

✠

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✠

THE star shines on in its starry realm, nor ever stops to relate. It is I, I, this lowly firefly, with heart aflame with longing, that shall tell you the wondrous story of the star.

✠

WHEN I shall get back to the naturalness of things I shall dispense with that prayer to resist desire.

✠

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✠

GIVE me that toiler's joy who has seen the sunlight burst on the distant turrets in the land of his desire.

✠

PRAY that thy dreams come true, yet, O thou shalt pray well if thou shalt pray for deferred fulfillment.

✠

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✠

HIS to rejoice with exceeding great joy who plucks the fruit of his planting, but his the divine anointing who watched and waited, and toiled and prayed — and failed — and can yet be glad.

✠

I PRAYED to be set free, and then I prayed that only mine own hands should set me free, that gaining freedom, I might not miss the overcomer's joy.

✠

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✠

I AM glad the thorn is on my brow, that the blood trickles over my face: when I see my brother's wounds I will also feel his pain.

I am glad I fell to-day beneath my cross: when I see another prostrate I will know the weight of the burden.

I am glad I cried for succor: I will know the sound of a heart-cry.

I am glad I suffered alone, deserted: I will know the bitterness of desolation.

✠

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✠

LET my grave be unmarked: I fear not to be forgotten.

✠

I PRAY not for your approval — the approval is not to you.

✠

MAY God forgive you your weakness — but let him damn mine.

✠

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✠

THAT you will not pardon — it will not essentially matter, but O if it should be that I could not forgive myself.

✠

I SEARCHED up and down the earth — and found it in my own soul.

I implored heaven and hell — and the field daisies answered me.

✠

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WHEN I pray, it shall be to the God within, and the responsibility of the fulfillment shall rest on me.

When I curse Fate — I will not curse Fate, I will not shift the responsibility; I will call down anathema on my own head.

✠

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I WILL not covet the gift that is yours, but I will pray that mine own be revealed.

I will not gaze with envious eyes while you mould the pliant clay, but I will take up mallet and chisel and go to work myself.

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YESTERDAY I prayed for patience and for strength to bear, but to-day I prayed for the spirit to rise up in my might and declare, "I am not the sacrifice. These are none of mine."

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✠

O GOD, let me not say, "Thine the power, glory be to God!" whilst thou dost, waiting, listen for me to say, "Mine the power, glory be to God!"

✠

I LONGED for opportunity to do my work, for conditions that would foster and advance, and just to prove the earnestness of my desire, that I could do the work were these things mine, I set about and did it while I pined.

✠

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I WILL not pray for strength. Dear Heaven, I am a Hercules of disseminated force.

I will not pray for opportunity. Dear Lord, the time and place are mine when I am equal to the time and place.

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O GOD, mine be that of which my lips fail in the uttering, which my soul can only express in its yearning, yet mine as true as this deep desire is mine, mine as true as this great unrest is mine.

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✠

NOT alone for that which is mine will I rejoice, but for that which has been withheld, which was coveted and longed for, but denied, for I am what I am for having had to rise superior to the need.

✠

HOPE not to sing a more wondrous song when thou hast reached the summit. Here on these slopes it must be born whilst thou art toiling up the way.

✠

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I MAY never take you farther than I have been myself, but you may press on when I tell you of the vision I beheld.

You may never fashion from the thing I wrought, but you may take your reckoning from the rare design where my clumsy hands fell short.

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IT is but common to believe in him who believes in himself, but O, if you would do aught uncommon, believe yet in him who does not believe in himself. Restore the faith to him.

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I WILL give my strong right hand to him who knows not the clasp of friendship.

I will sing my sweetest songs to him who has heard naught but discord.

I will give my fairest roses to him in whose life the flowers have never bloomed.

I will give to the heart-hungry my life's best love.

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I SAW a rare flower growing, and I sought to know whence came its entrancing redolence, its wondrous glow, and I saw that where it grew the ground was wet with tears.

I heard a song, and enraptured I sought to know the source of that melody, so deep, so sweet, and I saw that to reach the ambiency it must cross the threshold of a quivering lip.

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I WILL go back to the parting of the ways, and there on a cross-tree at the turn of the road I will nail this half-spent life, and above that cross-tree I will write: "I have risen again. Who goes back to the cross-roads reclaims his own divinity."

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✠

THOUGH you have not faith in me, I shall yet achieve; but O would you witness the act divine, add your faith unto mine.

✠

IF thou dost but free thyself, thou art a world's liberator.

If thou dost but set thine own feet out upon the way of light, thou art redeemer of men.

✠

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IF thou givest that which thou dost not want thou mayest benefit another, but O thou must sometimes give that which thou dost want if thou wouldst benefit thyself.

AND I said, I will measure my faith: Though betrayed, yet each recurring time have I still believed?

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✠

O MY Soul, my Soul, when wilt thou have kept thy sacred promise, when wilt thou have proved thy holy trust?

Not that I may more rejoice to live, but that with impunity I may also rejoice to die.

✠

WHO waits, and prays a more propitious time to be about his destiny, makes a pitiable confession. The restlessness of intensity will not be still, will not sit by and wait.

✠

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✠

LET me live this life with no thought of a hereafter, then I may live it as I would were there no hope to retrieve.

✠

AND if the plan be not for immortality, O I shall not complain. What had it not been mine, this too brief span of years? What had I missed this sweet mortality?

✠

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✠

A GREAT work demands a great sacrifice, and who is not capable of a great sacrifice is not capable of a great work.

✠

THE Æolian must be in your breast, else the winds are in vain.

✠

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BETTER than tiaras — the diadem of freedom.

Better than broad acres — a garden of heartsease.

Better than mines of gold — a mint of dreams.

Better than bars of silver — the silver of a laugh.

Better than strings of pearls — the crystal of a tear.

Better than bands of choristers — a lute in the soul.

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✠

I AM life's mystery,— and I alone am its solution.

I am the dreamer of dreams,— and I am dreams come true.

I am the supplicant,— and I am the god that answers prayer.

✠

I PRAYED for death — but now I know I should have prayed only that I might die to the things that inspired that desire.

✠

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✠

I BEGGED to escape from suffering; I prayed God to save my soul from sin. To-day I stand aghast at the thing I should have been had my prayer been heard.

✠

I WILL not believe it was God's will that this disaster should come to me, but O since it has befallen, I am sure God's will must be that I rise up in glory, where I might go down in despair.

✠

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✠

I WILL not endeavor to forget my sorrow by belittling it. Let my sorrow remain what it is, but O lift me up to mightier proportions.

✠

NOT all who die stay dead: To-day an unappeased yesterday reached back and struck me with her lash.

Not all deep sleep is dreamless: Last night from profound slumber my other self rose up and mocked at me.

✠

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I MAY be helpless to change your attitude toward me, but I am not helpless to disregard it.

I may be helpless that not one among the throng shall walk a little way with me, but I am not helpless to pass on alone.

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I DREAMED I fell down an awful precipice, and awoke to find myself lying on its very brink.

I dreamed I was lost in a bog, and when I awoke I saw before me the will-o'-the-wisp that was luring me on.

I dreamed I was crushed by an onrush of earth, and awoke to find my foot resting against the rock that would dislodge the avalanche.

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I WILL have me a symphony of coloring. I will enmesh me in the noon sun's gold and wind about me the moonlight's silver sheen.

I will dream in a gown made of the haze of a summer evening twilight, and I will have robe on robe of the sky's deep blue, and I will line them with clouds of ermine, and from their trailing folds red stars will gleam.

I will pluck the green from the treetops, where wild birds nest and sing, and in the weaving I will ensnare a song.

I will make another of the meadow's green, and I will hang about it garlands of wood violets, and fringe it with yellow daffodils, and dip it in the redolence of the hawthorn tree.

And there is yet another that I will wear when Sorrow is my guest, and I will make it of the cold, gray mist.

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NOT all my day can I spend in listening, for I, too, must evolve ere the night comes on.

Not all day long can I sing your praise, for the hour is here when I, too, must create.

Not all day long can I contemplate, for time is passing, and I, too, must live.

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I WILL eat the Dead Sea fruit that is pressed to my lips, I will eat the aloes and wormwood.

I will pass through the furnace whose firebrands mark my soul.

I will drink the brine of salty tears, but I will drain my cup and cast it from me.

I will bear my cross up Calvary, and from that exalted height will I view life anew.

I am greater than my sorrow: I endure, it will pass away.

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IF hungry and athirst I will go to him who, too, has known the long, gaunt form of Want.

If my burden were greater than my strength to bear, I would go to him who faltered once beneath a load of care.

If despairing and weary I longed for rest, I would go to him who once in dædal darkness lost his way.

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YOU peer into my life to find a lingering past, but I tell you it was sunk ten thousand fathoms deep and weighted down with my dead self.

You look into my breast to find that old, old open wound, but I tell you I seared it with my hot tears and only the cicatrix is there.

You look into my eyes to read that oft-told story of defeat, but I tell you that the plot was changed and you will see the flag of conquest waving from the turrets of my soul.

✠

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WHO plants flowers in his door-yard first nurtured them in his soul.

Long ere the magnolia waved o'er my estate, I caught the scent of its redolence and heard the birds singing in its branches.

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I WILL hasten to answer the cry of my soul, lest long unheeded it cease to call.

I will speed me about my high endeavor, lest long delayed the fire burn low.

I will quicken the day of the manifest, lest long unfilled I lose faith in my dreams.

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I MAY never traverse the halls of art, yet the dawning day is mine, and the fading twilight, and the lake at eve, and the galaxy of the midnight sky.

I may never come within hailing distance of a great music interpreter, yet I may listen with my soul to the silent symphony of a moonlight sonata.

I may never place in a Dresden vase one single hothouse flower, yet I may lave me in a field of yellow buttercups.

I may never find among my chattels caskets of frankincense and myrrh, yet I may sit in a rose-tree's shade, and I may wander through the wild violet's purple haze.

I may never see the far-off shimmer of the white sand of an ocean beach, yet I know where a tiny lake lies hidden in a bower of green, and the birds sing all day long, and the sunlight falls mottled on the water.

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I SAID, "It is desolation; it is neither seed-time nor harvest," but the ground lay fallow.

I complained, "It is ebb-tide; I drift in the moonless narrows," but another hour, a rift of illumination and flood-tide, and I swept out to the high seas.

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IT was a buffoon's painted face I looked upon, but I saw through his rippling laugh the droop of sorrow in his lips.

It was an artist's canvas at which I gazed, resplendent with the burst of a sunrise at sea, but I saw the artist and I knew by the light of memory that lingered in his eyes that he had traversed the shadow.

It was a carol that filled the air, but I knew by the tender mellowness of that voice that it was laden with the echo of a moan.

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I WANDERED one night out over the brink of eternity, up to the Gates of Gold. "Open and let me in," I cried. "'Tis a weary pilgrim, a lost soul. Is there no room in heaven? Is there no balm in Gilead? An outcast of men, will you not take me in? The life-boat is for the storm-tossed ship, and so is the signal light in the harbor, and this — this is the wreck of a soul crying for the life-line!"

The gates swung open.

I awoke and went out again into the world of men, and all day I sang at my work.

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I SAID it is a loveless world — and I confessed to have attracted my own like.

I said I have no faith — and I confessed to have at one time or other been my own Judas.

I dipped my brush in venom — and to the discerning I but portrayed myself.

✠

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THE world may come upon thy greatness in a night, but not so with thee.

A sudden uplift of voices may proclaim it, but thou shalt listen as one who hears an old familiar story told.

✠

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THINK you to-morrow when the fullness of life's treasure is mine, that it will hold aught that is new or strange to me? I tell you that I long have known each masterpiece that hangs upon the walls of my To Be, and each royal robe that I shall wear was spun from starshine in my dreams; and not a jewel shall rest upon my brow but whose strange light has long enchanted me, and not a strain shall rise to charm my ear but whose far melody has long been playing in my soul.

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WHETHER thou be king or peasant, I shall remember only that thou art a soul.

Though thy raiment be of hodden gray, yet I shall speak to royalty, and though it be of ermine, I shall speak only to the peasant heart beneath.

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I WOULD not be the ship that plies a wonted main, but I would be the tramp-boat and sail the port of the world.

I would not be the beaten path, but I would be the by-ways, the undiscovered country.

I would not be the old, but I would be the new, the vital, the oncoming.

I would not be of the ninety and nine, but I would be the one, and through the wilderness I would mark a new trail.

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THERE are no surprises to him who has ordered his life.

Who planted the tree at his window ledge is not surprised that birds should come singing there.

Who nurtured the shrub by his garden wall is not surprised when the roses bloom.

Who set his tent by a heaven-blue lake is not surprised at morn that great white swans are resting near.

✠

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GIVE me one hour of love that is consumed by the intensity of its own fire, rather than a lifetime of embers whose feeble flame knows not outburst or extinction.

Give me one effervescent glass, with its sodden dregs of memory, if I may be relieved of the draught of insipidity.

Give me a life of action, and I will accept its sorrow and its tragedy, if I may escape the way of inanition.

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HE shall be my mentor who can love more and forgive oftener.

He shall teach me duty to self who can make greater sacrifice.

He shall teach me skill at thrift who scatters with a lavish hand.

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I STOOD afar off, watching the conflict of humanity, till wise old Life came along and tossed me into the arena, saying, "There! take that, pedant, if you would know."

I pondered long the book of suffering, till Time stood before me saying, "There is a quicker way," and he thrust his flaming brand against my breast.

✠

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COUNT not upon thy distinction that thou hast been chosen sharer of joys.

The rabble may have of my gold and my pleasure, but, oh! I will have a care as to who shall share of my sorrow.

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TO-DAY I am a serf, but to-morrow is the day of manumission.

To-day I will make a survey, but to-morrow I will reset the stakes.

To-day I splash in the shallows, but to-morrow I will pass the danger line and swim the infinite sea.

To-day I walk the confines, but to-morrow I will swing out into the illimitable.

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I WILL find my joy —

Not in a bed of hothouse roses, but in a wayward roadside flower.

Not in an August seashore, but in a hidden woodland stream.

Not in a stately ocean liner, but in a tiny boat that drifts and dips and trails among the water-lilies.

Not in the emblazoned halls of revelry, but out under the quiet stars.

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HE is my greatest well-wisher who wishes me not only all attainment, but much defeat.

Not only all joy, but much of sorrow.

Not only all solace, but much despair.

✠

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WHO thinks he will fail — will probably fail.

Who believes that dreams are only dreams — will probably find it so.

Who doubts himself — will achieve only such results as will confirm it.

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